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ABSTRACT

A study examined the process of change in story development (in contrast to documenting common structures) found in the stories generated by cross-cultural/cross-linguistic students. Subjects, 12 first-grade native English-speaking students in either of two separate school districts and 23 cross-cultural/cross-linguistic students representing the Filipino or Central American cultures enrolled in kindergarten through sixth grades in three separate school districts, were interviewed at the beginning of first grade, the end of first grade, the end of the second grade, and in the fifth or sixth grade. During these interviews, students were asked to tell two stories using different elicitation procedures (oral or finger puppet). Following story transcription, each story was analyzed for the story/language elements. Results indicated that: (1) the elicitation procedures affected students' uses of story sources, plots, and characters; (2) microstructures such as story conventions, clausal connectors, and T-units were stable regardless of elicitation procedure; and (3) the cross-cultural/cross-linguistic students used a wider range of tenses and a greater reliance on relative clauses than native English speakers. (Thirty-five references are attached.) (RS)

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Cross-Cultural/Cross-Linguistic and Native English

Speakers Generated Stories: A Study in Contrast

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A CROSS-CULTURAL STUDY

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CROSS-CULTURAL/CROSS-LINGUISTIC AND NATIVE ENGLISH
SPEAKERS GENERATED STORIES: A STUDY IN CONTRAST

Although the study of children's stories has been an ongoing concern of linguists, anthropologists, and psychologists (Favat, 1977), the past decade has witnessed a surge of interest in children's stories from researchers in various disciplines. Early studies followed two approaches for story analysis: the analysis of story content or the analysis of story structure. Story content analysis has centered primarily on examining motivational and psychodynamic aspects of story characters (Erikson, 1963; Pitcher & Prelinger, 1963; Ames, 1966). These studies have noted that themes or topics predominate and that themes change with age.

Early research on story structure focused on formal models of structure such as story grammar and story schemata. These models specified basic story elements and formed sets of rules similar to sentence grammar for ordering the elements (Rumelhart, 1975; Thorndyke, 1977). Various developmental models have been proposed for story analysis (Applebee, 1978; Stein, 1978; Sutton-Smith, 1981). Although several text structure models have been proposed, perhaps the most widely known and used text analysis schemes have been Meyer's (1984) and Kintsch's (1974) models. Text structure "specifies the interrelationships among items of information which compose the texts, as well as indicating the subordination and coordination of this information" (Meyer, 1984, p. 117).

As both text structure and reader's knowledge impact comprehension, the role of larger structures or schemata becomes increasingly important in the comprehension process. These structures include specific knowledge with which to link the text content knowledge and very generalized structures to organize event sequences described in the text (Perfetti, 1986). Reader's knowledge or

background knowledge or reader's schema is the "organized knowledge of the world [that] provides much of the basis for comprehending, learning and remembering ideas in stories and texts" (Anderson, 1984, p. 243). Although Perfetti (1986) believed that three processes--text modeling, lexical access, and proposition encoding--were evident in any culture during reading, the cultural constraints become even more evident in the action.

More recently Graesser, Golding, and Long (1991) believed narratives to be complex: "the cognitive representation of narrative is therefore expected to be a complex, multifacted configuration of knowledge" (p. 178). Among the nine narrative components to be considered were oral, written, and filmed narratives and points of view and perspectives.

In language acquisition the growth of conceptual knowledge has also become an area of growing interest. Studies have followed two approaches: the study of taxonomic knowledge (Anglin, 1977; Rosch, Mervis, Gary, Johnson & Boyes-Braem, 1976), and the study of event-based knowledge structures (Nelson, 1986). Knowledge structures guide word acquisition by anchoring word meanings within the structure. Whereas taxonomic knowledge structures represent categories and classes of objects, event-based knowledge structures focus on sequences of events or routines. Nelson (1986) proposed that the two knowledge structures are linked and suggested that the developmental trend is from event-based to slot-filler to taxonomic knowledge structures.

The impact of culture on language has been a commonly accepted notion. Lado (1957) noted "that individuals tend to transfer the forms and meanings, and the distribution of forms and meanings of their native language and culture to the foreign language and culture--both productively when attempting to speak the

language and to act in the culture and receptively when attempting to grasp and understand the language and the culture as practiced by natives" (p. 2). Cultural differences have been noted in conversational styles (Tannen, 1984), allocation and acknowledgment (Volk, 1990), disagreeing and requesting (Garcia, 1989), and rapport strategies (Fiksdal, 1988). Such differences have been reported to be products of different cultural backgrounds, due to an interpretation problem, or the result of drawing upon a different rapport system. Volk (1990) also cited options related to language choice: the possibility of speaking in English, in one's native language, or of code switching. She noted other constraints operating in the context such as the limitation and breadth of children's developing social skills, the activity in which they were engaged, and the momentary motivation of the participants.

The importance or centrality of narrative in a child's development of communicative ability has been proposed by Halliday (1976a) and Hymes (1975). Yet sociocultural differences as well as developmental differences have been noted. Hicks (1990) suggested that there were developmental differences in children's abilities to produce generically distinct texts. Heath (1983) has provided an ethnographic description of narrative genre found in children's primary language.

Researchers such as Olson (1984) have been examining oral and written discourses with the goal of understanding the difficulties children must overcome in becoming fully literate. In looking at literacy for nonnative speakers in a particular culture, Venezky (1990) suggested differences to be considered for our culture were nonnative speakers of English versus nonspeakers of English and literacy backgrounds in their respective cultures.

Educators are interested in children's stories from a holistic perspective, i.e., both story and language elements across oral and written modes which reflect cultural differences. Developing such a knowledge base is essential to facilitate reading so that cognitive and linguistic continuity is developmentally appropriate with children's experiences and language.

Most research on children's stories has used cross-sectional designs; longitudinal studies for narrative development are lacking. Fisher and Corrigan (1981) have suggested that cross-sectional designs tend to reveal commonalities across children, whereas longitudinal designs tend to reveal differences within children. Thus, this longitudinal design for native English-speakers may reveal the process of change in story development in contrast to documenting the common structures found in the stories generated by cross-cultural/cross-linguistic students.

For this study each story was analyzed in terms of its macrostructures, i.e., the semantic content and connectivity of sentences, and its macrostructure, i.e., the hierarchical structures which reveal the gist of the text (Kintsch, 1974; Kintsch & van Dijk, 1978). Story microstructures referred to the use of formal conventions, clausal connectors, and T-units (Hunt, 1965). Story macrostructures referred to the sources of the stories, the overall plot organization, and the number and kinds of characters. The study addressed three research questions: (a) What are the story/language elements found in native English speaking students' generated stories in contrast to cross-cultural/cross-linguistic students' generated stories in grades kindergarten through six?; (b) What are the effects of an elicitation procedure on story/language elements found in their generated stories?; and (c) What are the story/language elements of the nonnative English-speaking students' oral stories in contrast with their written stories?

Method

Twelve native English-speaking students were selected as participants in the study; they were enrolled in the first grades in either of two separate school districts. Each classroom teacher designated two students with high reading ability, two with average reading ability, and two with low reading ability as indexed by their classroom performances and reading achievement scores on the Iowa Text of Basic Skills and the Metropolitan Achievement Text. Two low-ability students--one from each school--were lost from the study. Twenty-three cross-cultural/cross-linguistic students were selected for the study by virtue of being in the United States one year or less; the cultures represented were Filipino and Central American. The subjects were enrolled in grades kindergarten through six in three separate school districts. The number of students at each grade level ranged from two to seven.

Each native English-speaking student was interviewed four times: (a) the beginning of first grade, (b) the end of first grade, (c) the end of second grade, and (d) the second week of March of the fifth grade for students in one school district and the third week of January of the sixth grade for students in the other school district.

During interviews each participant was asked to tell two stories using different elicitation procedures. In the oral elicitation procedure, the student was directed to "Tell me a story." After completing the story, six finger animal puppets were placed in front of the child. The student was instructed to "Choose one of these puppets, two of these puppets, or three or more of these puppets, and tell me a story."

The same instructions were provided for the cross-cultural/cross-linguistic students at the beginning of the study. However, as three students were unable to generate oral stories, the procedures were modified. Instructions were provided in English and then in Spanish. *Rosie's Walk* was shared in English with some code switching in Spanish. First, the students were asked to tell a story with the finger puppets, then to "Tell me a story," and last to write a story. Eleven students told their stories in English, and twelve told their stories in Spanish.

Following story transcription, each story was analyzed for the story/language elements. Specific definitions and illustrations for each element was provided in a previous report (Ice, 1987). At least 90% level of inter-rater agreement was achieved for each story/language element with a range from 90% for story plots to 99% for T-units segmentation. Statistical analysis involved the use of frequencies, means, and percentages to document the story/language elements for the research questions. Although the sample size was small, the results of this study helped to clarify relationships within and across (a) grades, (b) elicitation procedures, (c) story/language elements, and (d) oral and written language modes for cross-cultural/cross-linguistic students.

Results

Story sources

Native English-speaking students told primarily novel and personal experience stories at the beginning of first grade. By fifth/sixth grades, personal experience stories increased as familiar stories and novel stories declined. The cross-cultural/cross-linguistic kindergarten and sixth grade students told novel stores exclusively, while third and fourth grade students told primarily combined sources of stories. First and second grades students' stories were from all sources.

Their written stories were from all sources and varied from grade to grade except for grade five wherein the students wrote exclusively novel stories.

For both sample populations of students when the stories were elicited using the animal puppets, all students almost exclusively told novel stories. Seldom did the students relate the puppets to actual experiences, familiar stories, or combined sources.

Story plots

At the beginning of first grade, most of the native English-speaking students' stories used temporal sequence. By fifth/sixth grades most of the stories used mixed temporal and causal relations, but embedded plots were emerging. The developmental trend was from temporal sequences to mixed temporal and causal relations to embedded plots. Although the cross-cultural/cross-linguistic students relied primarily on temporal sequence, a few mixed temporal and causal plots were emerging by the fourth grade. Embedded plots were not evident in their stories.

The elicitation procedure did influence the nature of the story plots for native English-speaking students. With the "Tell me a story" prompt, the plots tended to be temporal sequence. With the puppets the story plots tended to be mixed temporal and causal relations, but temporal sequences were common. However, the cross-cultural/cross-linguistic students tended to rely primarily on temporal sequences regardless of the elicitation procedure.

Story characters

For both sample populations, the puppets elicited almost exclusively animals as characters, whereas the "Tell me a story" prompt and written stories contained primarily people characters. Novel characters were infrequently elicited by any procedure.

Story conventions

For native English-speaking students, the story conventions used changed across the six-year period. Fairy tale openings were the predominate opening used throughout the grades. Immediate action openings, which were predominate in their stories at the beginning of first grade, steadily decreased from first to fifth/sixth grades. Only in the fifth/sixth grades was there a noticeable use of story settings. For cross-cultural/cross-linguistic students, story openings were either immediate action or fairy tales. There was no evidence of story settings at any grade level.

Terminated endings were the predominate type of story ending for both sample populations of students. However, for the native English-speaking students, terminated endings decreased from first to fifth/sixth grades. Formal closings appeared during fifth/sixth grades. Cross-cultural/cross-linguistic students' stories used almost exclusively terminated endings. Fairy tale and closed endings were not evident in their stories. For both populations of students, fairy tale endings were infrequent even though fairy tale openings were common.

Past tense was the predominate story tense for native English-speaking students until the fifth/sixth grades when mixed tenses became the most frequent tense used. Episodic and present/future tenses were seldom used. For cross-cultural/cross-linguistic students a wider range of tenses was used. Although five written stories contained no tenses and others a few mixed tenses, past tense and present tense were the predominate tenses for both language modes.

Clausal connectors

The types of clausal connectors used by the native English-speaking students changed from first grade to fifth/sixth grades. Of the clausal connectors,

only serial ands, causal connectives, and relative pronouns steadily increased across the span, while the others fluctuated in frequency. By the fifth/sixth grades the students used many more connectors, especially causal, disjunctive, serial ands, and relative pronouns. For the cross-cultural/cross-linguistic students, only serial ands and relative pronouns steadily increased, while the other connectors fluctuated in frequency.

T-units

At all grade levels the oral elicitation procedure tended to elicit more T-units with simple sentences being more common than other sentence types. For native English-speaking students, the incidence of simple sentence was relatively stable from first to second grade but showed a dramatic increase by fifth/sixth grades. Compound elements sentences were relatively stable throughout the time span. Main clauses with multiple subordinate clauses occurred infrequently until fifth/sixth grades. With the puppet elicitation, the students relied primarily on simple sentences to tell their stories although main clause with one subordinate clause showed a slight increase.

For cross-cultural/cross-linguistic students, both oral and puppet elicitation procedures tended to generate relative similar T-units. Simple sentences were more common than other sentence types, and main clauses with multiple subordinate clauses occurred infrequently even though they appeared at every grade level. For their written stories, the students used simple sentences almost exclusively. Five students were unable to write a story using sentence structure.

Discussion

Generating stories requires students to orchestrate both story and language elements into organized coherent stories. The findings that the two elicitation

procedures affected students' uses of story sources, plots, and characters suggest that the macrostructures of stories are malleable. That is, with the puppet elicitation procedure, certain story sources, characters, and plots were more prevalent than with the "Tell me a story" elicitation procedure. Such preferences in sources, characters, and plots reflect relationships between story tellers and the constraints that exist in each setting. These preferences also revealed story tellers' ability to work with or around such constraints.

The microstructural changes to story conventions, clausal connectors, and T-units reflected additions to the aforementioned elements. These microstructures appeared to be stable regardless of which elicitation procedure was used. Even with the addition of story elements such as settings, closed endings, and future/present tense, the students relied primarily on formal story conventions to organize their stories. Their story organization also reflected a reliance on temporal connectors and simple sentence structure even though the students increasingly used relative pronouns, causal connectors, and subordinate clauses.

However, the cross-cultural/cross-linguistic students used a wider range of tenses and a greater reliance on relative clauses than native English speakers. This observation suggests that they may have a different perspective for noting time and expressing subordination. Such differences may reflect linguistic differences between language forms and meanings.

The cross-cultural/cross-linguistic students' written stories may reflect developmental differences as well as literacy backgrounds. Although all students produced a written text, two kindergarten students' texts consisted of names or consonants or numerals. One first grade student wrote 'tennis shoes, boots, slippers' while another wrote 'frog under the table'. One third grade student wrote

'penguino, casa', his name, and letters. Yet each of the aforementioned students generated oral stories which contained the story/language elements. Such observations suggest that the understanding of written conventions are developed primarily by interaction with written language. Furthermore, the similarities and differences between their oral and written stories may lend support to Scinto's (1986) equipollent theory of written language: "spoken and written language mutually access the underlying code independently and are themselves linked by systematic translation rules" (p. 33).

The language choice and the change in the elicitation procedures for the cross-cultural/cross-linguistic students may indicate a need to consider more closely the culture and literacy backgrounds of individual learners in educational settings and activities. The establishment of rapport and the establishment of context and expectations by educators may be prerequisites for learning.

Several implications from this study can be inferred by educators. Although children appear to pick up spontaneously the story macrostructures from the stories they experience, the increased complex story/language elements found in their stories reflect their cognitive growth of causality and their ability to handle multiple demands. Thus, classroom provision for story-telling and story-writing activities becomes even more important as students progress in their education.

Developing a better understanding of story plot may assist students in processing the many interwoven plot variations found in narratives. Knowledge of and use of language structures are important for understanding and producing complex texts. Consequently, students may need explicit instruction with complex sentence and language structures if they are to use and understand them. Apparently students' use of serial ands, simple past tense and complex sentence

structures are not taken from story models. Again, students may need explicit instruction if they are to use and understand them. As students' generated stories at the point of utterance are essentially skeletons, they may need guidance in orchestrating story and language elements so that their stories are more fully developed.

Finally cross-cultural/cross-linguistic students may require more context and rapport-building strategies prior to generating stories than native English-speaking students. Such understandings of narratives are important for guiding students if they are develop understandings of language and texts that go beyond their own. In view of the current emphasis on literature-based reading instruction, a greater understanding by teachers of variance in cultural, language, and story components should assist in narrowing the gap between reader and text.

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